

*What Every Member of the  
Trade Community Should Know About:*

# *Reasonable Care*

*(A Checklist for Compliance)*



**A Basic Level  
Informed Compliance Publication of the  
U.S. Customs Service**

**January 1998**

## PREFACE

On December 8, 1993, Title VI of the North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (Pub. L. 103-182, 107 Stat. 2057), which is also known as the Customs Modernization Act or “Mod Act,” became effective. These provisions amended many sections of the Tariff Act of 1930 and related laws. Two new concepts which emerge from the Mod Act are “*informed compliance*” and “*shared responsibility*.” These concepts are premised on the idea that in order to maximize voluntary compliance with Customs laws and regulations, the trade community needs to be clearly and completely informed of its legal obligations. Accordingly, the Mod Act imposes a greater obligation on Customs to provide the public with improved information concerning the trade community's responsibilities and rights under the Customs and related laws. In addition, both the trade and Customs share responsibility in carrying out import requirements. For example, under section 484 of the Tariff Act, as amended, (19 U.S.C. §1484) the importer of record is responsible for using reasonable care to enter, classify and value imported merchandise, and provide any other information necessary to enable Customs to properly assess duties, collect accurate statistics and determine whether any other applicable legal requirement is met. The Customs Service is then responsible for fixing the final classification and value of the merchandise. The failure of an importer of record to exercise reasonable care may lead to delay in the release of merchandise or the imposition of penalties.

This office has been given a major role in meeting Customs informed compliance responsibilities. In order to provide information to the public, Customs intends to issue a series of informed compliance publications, and possibly CD-ROMs and videos, on topics such as value, classification, entry procedures, determination of country of origin, marking requirements, intellectual property rights, record keeping, drawback, penalties and liquidated damages.

The Penalties Branch, International Trade Compliance Division, Office of Regulations and Rulings has prepared this publication on *Reasonable Care*, as part of a series of informed compliance publications advising the trade community of changes in Customs procedures as a result of the Mod Act. It is hoped that this material, together with seminars and increased access to Customs rulings, will help the trade community in improving voluntary compliance with the Customs laws.

The information provided in this publication is for general information purposes only. Recognizing that many complicated factors may be involved in customs issues, an importer may wish to obtain a ruling under Customs Regulations, 19 C.F.R. Part 177, or obtain advice from an expert (such as a licensed Customs Broker, attorney or consultant) who specializes in Customs matters. Reliance solely on the general information in this pamphlet may not be considered reasonable care.

Comments and suggestions are welcomed, and should be addressed to the Assistant Commissioner at the Office of Regulations and Rulings, U.S. Customs Service, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20229.

Stuart P. Seidel  
Assistant Commissioner  
Office of Regulations and Rulings

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Note: The Reasonable Care Checklist appeared as T.D. 97-96, 62 *Federal Register* 64248, December 4, 1997 and was reprinted in 31 *Customs Bulletin* 2, December 17, 1997. These publications contain additional background material and an analysis of comments submitted by the trade community to earlier drafts. In this Informed Compliance Publication, references to “brokers” has been changed to “Customs brokers,” for clarification.

## **REASONABLE CARE CHECKLIST**

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most significant effects of the Customs Modernization Act is the establishment of the clear requirement that parties exercise “reasonable care” in importing into the United States. Section 484 of the Tariff Act, as amended, requires an importer of record “using reasonable care” to make entry by filing such information as is necessary to enable the Customs Service to determine whether the merchandise may be released from customs custody,” and using reasonable care-- “complete the entry by filing with the Customs Service the declared value, classification and rate of duty” and “such other documentation ...or information as is necessary to enable the Customs Service to....properly assess duties...collect accurate statistics...determine whether any other applicable requirement of law...is met.” Despite the seemingly simple connotation of the term “reasonable care,” this explicit responsibility defies easy explanation. The facts and circumstances surrounding every import transaction differ - from the experience of the importer to the nature of the imported articles. Consequently, neither the Customs Service nor the importing community can develop a foolproof reasonable care “checklist” which would cover every import transaction. On the other hand, In keeping with the Modernization Act’s theme of “informed compliance,” the Customs Service would like to take this opportunity to recommend that the importing community examine the list of questions below. In Customs view, the list of questions may prompt or suggest a program, framework or methodology which importers may find useful in avoiding compliance problems and meeting “reasonable care” responsibilities.

Obviously, the questions below cannot be exhaustive or encyclopedic - ordinarily, every import transaction is different. For the same reason, it cannot be overemphasized that although the following information is provided to promote enhanced compliance with the Customs laws and regulations, it has no legal, binding or precedential effect on Customs or the importing community. In this regard, Customs notes that the checklist is not an attempt to create a presumption of negligence, but rather, an attempt to educate, inform and provide guidance to the importing community. Consequently, Customs believes that the following information may be helpful to the importing community and hopes that this document will facilitate and encourage importers to develop their own unique compliance measurement plans, reliable procedures and “reasonable care” programs.

As a convenience to the public, the checklist also includes the text of a checklist previously published in the Federal Register for use in certain textile and apparel importations. The full document was published in 62 FR 48340 (September 15, 1997).

As a final reminder, it should be noted that to further assist the importing community, Customs issues rulings and informed compliance publications on a variety of technical subjects and processes. It is strongly recommended that importers always make sure that they are using the latest versions

of these publications.

**ASKING AND ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS MAY BE  
HELPFUL IN ASSISTING IMPORTERS IN THE EXERCISE OF  
REASONABLE CARE:**

**GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR ALL TRANSACTIONS:**

1. If you have not retained an expert to assist you in complying with Customs requirements, do you have access to the Customs Regulations (Title 19 of the Code of Federal Regulations), the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States, and the GPO publication "Customs Bulletin and Decisions?" Do you have access to the Customs Internet Website, Customs Electronic Bulletin Board or other research service to permit you to establish reliable procedures and facilitate compliance with Customs laws and regulations?
2. Has a responsible and knowledgeable individual within your organization reviewed the Customs documentation prepared by you or your expert to ensure that it is full, complete and accurate? If that documentation was prepared outside your own organization, do you have a reliable system in place to insure that you receive copies of the information as submitted to Customs; that it is reviewed for accuracy; and that Customs is timely apprised of any needed corrections?
3. If you use an expert to assist you in complying with Customs requirements, have you discussed your importations in advance with that person and have you provided that person with full, complete and accurate information about the import transactions?
4. Are identical transactions or merchandise handled differently at different ports or Customs offices within the same port? If so, have you brought this to the attention of the appropriate Customs officials?

**QUESTIONS ARRANGED BY TOPIC:**

**Merchandise Description & Tariff Classification**

Basic Question: Do you know or have you established a reliable procedure or program to ensure that you know what you ordered, where it was made and what it is made of?

1. Have you provided or established reliable procedures to ensure you provide a complete and accurate description of your merchandise to Customs in accordance with 19 U.S.C. 1481? (Also, see 19 CFR 141.87 and 19 CFR 141.89 for special merchandise description requirements.)
2. Have you provided or established reliable procedures to ensure you provide a correct tariff

classification of your merchandise to Customs in accordance with 19 U.S.C. 1484?

3. Have you obtained a Customs "ruling" regarding the description of the merchandise or its tariff classification (See 19 CFR Part 177), and if so, have you established reliable procedures to ensure that you have followed the ruling and brought it to Customs attention?
4. Where merchandise description or tariff classification information is not immediately available, have you established a reliable procedure for providing that information, and is the procedure being followed?
5. Have you participated in a Customs pre-classification of your merchandise relating to proper merchandise description and classification?
6. Have you consulted the tariff schedules, Customs informed compliance publications, court cases and/or Customs rulings to assist you in describing and classifying the merchandise?
7. Have you consulted with a Customs "expert" (e.g., lawyer, Customs broker, accountant, or Customs consultant) to assist in the description and/or classification of the merchandise?
8. If you are claiming a conditionally free or special tariff classification/provision for your merchandise (e.g., GSP, HTS Item 9802, NAFTA, etc.), How have you verified that the merchandise qualifies for such status? Have you obtained or developed reliable procedures to obtain any required or necessary documentation to support the claim? If making a NAFTA preference claim, do you already have a NAFTA certificate of origin in your possession?
9. Is the nature of your merchandise such that a laboratory analysis or other specialized procedure is suggested to assist in proper description and classification?
10. Have you developed a reliable program or procedure to maintain and produce any required Customs entry documentation and supporting information?

## **Valuation**

Basic Questions: Do you know or have you established reliable procedures to know the "price actually paid or payable" for your merchandise? Do you know the terms of sale; whether there will be rebates, tie-ins, indirect costs, additional payments; whether "assists" were provided, commissions or royalties paid? Are amounts actual or estimated? Are you and the supplier "related parties?"

1. Have you provided or established reliable procedures to provide Customs with a proper declared value for your merchandise in accordance with 19 U.S.C. 1484 and 19 U.S.C. 1401a?

2. Have you obtained a Customs "ruling" regarding the valuation of the merchandise (See 19 CFR Part 177), and if so, have you established reliable procedures to ensure that you have followed the ruling and brought it to Customs attention?
3. Have you consulted the Customs valuation laws and regulations, Customs Valuation Encyclopedia, Customs informed compliance publications, court cases and Customs rulings to assist you in valuing merchandise?
4. Have you consulted with a Customs "expert" (e.g., lawyer, accountant, Customs broker, Customs consultant) to assist in the valuation of the merchandise?
5. If you purchased the merchandise from a "related" seller, have you established procedures to ensure that you have reported that fact upon entry and taken measures or established reliable procedures to ensure that value reported to Customs meets one of the "related party" tests?
6. Have you taken measures or established reliable procedures to ensure that all of the legally required costs or payments associated with the imported merchandise have been reported to Customs (e.g., assists, all commissions, indirect payments or rebates, royalties, etc.)?
7. If you are declaring a value based on a transaction in which you were/are not the buyer, have you substantiated that the transaction is a bona fide sale at arm's length and that the merchandise was clearly destined to the United States at the time of sale?
8. If you are claiming a conditionally free or special tariff classification/provision for your merchandise (e.g., GSP, HTS Item 9802, NAFTA, etc.), have you established a reliable system or program to ensure that you reported the required value information and obtained any required or necessary documentation to support the claim?
9. Have you established a reliable program or procedure to produce any required entry documentation and supporting information?

### **Country of Origin/Marking/Quota**

Basic Question: Have you taken reliable measures to ascertain the correct country of origin for the imported merchandise?

1. Have you established reliable procedures to ensure that you report the correct country of origin on Customs entry documents?
2. Have you established reliable procedures to verify or ensure that the merchandise is properly marked upon entry with the correct country of origin (if required) in accordance with 19 U.S.C. 1304

and any other applicable special marking requirement (watches, gold, textile labeling, etc)?

3. Have you obtained a Customs "ruling" regarding the proper marking and country of origin of the merchandise (See 19 CFR Part 177), and if so, have you established reliable procedures to ensure that you followed the ruling and brought it to Customs attention?

4. Have you consulted with a Customs "expert" (e.g., lawyer, accountant, Customs broker, Customs consultant) regarding the correct country of origin/proper marking of your merchandise?

5. Have you taken reliable and adequate measures to communicate Customs country of origin marking requirements to your foreign supplier prior to importation of your merchandise?

6. If you are claiming a change in the origin of the merchandise or claiming that the goods are of U.S. origin, have you taken required measures to substantiate your claim (e.g. Do you have U.S. milling certificates or manufacturer's affidavits attesting to the production in the U.S.)?

7. If you are importing textiles or apparel, have you developed reliable procedures to ensure that you have ascertained the correct country of origin in accordance with 19 U.S.C. 3592 (Section 334, Pub. Law 103-465) and assured yourself that no illegal transshipment or false or fraudulent practices were involved?

8. Do you know how your goods are made from raw materials to finished goods, by whom and where?

9. Have you checked with Customs and developed a reliable procedure or system to ensure that the quota category is correct?

10. Have you checked or developed reliable procedures to check the Status Report on Current Import Quotas (Restraint Levels) issued by Customs to determine if your goods are subject to a quota category which has "part" categories?

11. Have you taken reliable measures to ensure that you have obtained the correct visas for your goods if they are subject to visa categories?

12. In the case of textile articles, have you prepared or developed a reliable program to prepare the proper country declaration for each entry, i.e., a single country declaration (if wholly obtained/produced) or a multi-country declaration (if raw materials from one country were produced into goods in a second)?

13. Have you established a reliable maintenance program or procedure to ensure you can produce any required entry documentation and supporting information, including any required certificates of origin?

## **Intellectual Property Rights**

Basic Question: Have you determined or established a reliable procedure to permit you to determine whether your merchandise or its packaging bear or use any trademarks or copyrighted matter or are patented and, if so, that you have a legal right to import those items into, and/or use those items in, the U.S.?

1. If you are importing goods or packaging bearing a trademark registered in the U.S., have you checked or established a reliable procedure to ensure that it is genuine and not restricted from importation under the “gray-market” or parallel import requirements of U.S. law (see 19 CFR 133.21), or that you have permission from the trademark holder to import such merchandise?
2. If you are importing goods or packaging which consist of, or contain registered copyrighted material, have you checked or established a reliable procedure to ensure that it is authorized and genuine? If you are importing sound recordings of live performances, were the recordings authorized?
3. Have you checked or developed a reliable procedure to see if your merchandise is subject to an International Trade Commission or court ordered exclusion order?
4. Have you established a reliable procedure to ensure that you maintain and can produce any required entry documentation and supporting information?

## **Miscellaneous Questions**

1. Have you taken measures or developed reliable procedures to ensure that your merchandise complies with other agency requirements (e.g., FDA, EPA/DOT, CPSC, FTC, Agriculture, etc.) prior to or upon entry, including the procurement of any necessary licenses or permits?
2. Have you taken measures or developed reliable procedures to check to see if your goods are subject to a Commerce Department dumping or countervailing duty investigation or determination, and if so, have you complied or developed reliable procedures to ensure compliance with Customs reporting requirements upon entry (e.g., 19 CFR 141.61)?
3. Is your merchandise subject to quota/visa requirements, and if so, have you provided or developed a reliable procedure to provide a correct visa for the goods upon entry?
4. Have you taken reliable measures to ensure and verify that you are filing the correct type of Customs entry (e.g., TIB, T&E, consumption entry, mail entry, etc.), as well as ensure that you have the right to make entry under the Customs Regulations?

## **Additional Questions for Textile and Apparel Importers**

Note: Section 333 of the Uruguay Round Implementation Act (19 U.S.C. 1592a) authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to publish a list of foreign producers, manufacturers, suppliers, sellers, exporters, or other foreign persons who have been found to have violated 19 U.S.C. 1592 by using certain false, fraudulent or counterfeit documentation, labeling, or prohibited transshipment practices in connection with textiles and apparel products. Section 1592a also requires any importer of record entering, introducing, or attempting to introduce into the commerce of the United States textile or apparel products that were either directly or indirectly produced, manufactured, supplied, sold, exported, or transported by such named person to show, to the satisfaction of the Secretary, that such importer has exercised reasonable care to ensure that the textile or apparel products are accompanied by documentation, packaging, and labeling that are accurate as to its origin. Under section 1592a, reliance solely upon information regarding the imported product from a person named on the list does not constitute the exercise of reasonable care. Textile and apparel importers who have some commercial relationship with one or more of the listed parties must exercise a degree of reasonable care in ensuring that the documentation covering the imported merchandise, as well as its packaging and labeling, is accurate as to the country of origin of the merchandise. This degree of reasonable care must rely on more than information supplied by the named party.

In meeting the reasonable care standard when importing textile or apparel products and when dealing with a party named on the list published pursuant to section 592A an importer should consider the following questions in attempting to ensure that the documentation, packaging, and labeling is accurate as to the country of origin of the imported merchandise. The list of questions is not exhaustive but is illustrative.

1. Has the importer had a prior relationship with the named party?
2. Has the importer had any detentions and/or seizures of textile or apparel products that were directly or indirectly produced, supplied, or transported by the named party?
3. Has the importer visited the company's premises and ascertained that the company has the capacity to produce the merchandise?
4. Where a claim of an origin conferring process is made in accordance with 19 CFR 102.21, has the importer ascertained that the named party actually performed the required process?
5. Is the named party operating from the same country as is represented by that party on the documentation, packaging or labeling?
6. Have quotas for the imported merchandise closed or are they nearing closing from the main producer countries for this commodity?

7. What is the history of this country regarding this commodity?
8. Have you asked questions of your supplier regarding the origin of the product?
9. Where the importation is accompanied by a visa, permit, or license, has the importer verified with the supplier or manufacturer that the visa, permit, and/or license is both valid and accurate as to its origin? Has the importer scrutinized the visa, permit or license as to any irregularities that would call its authenticity into question?

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **Customs Electronic Bulletin Board**

The Customs Electronic Bulletin Board (CEBB) is an automated system which provides the entire trade community with current, relevant information regarding Customs operations and items of special interest. It was established as another effort to promote the Customs Service as "trade friendly" within the importing and exporting community. The CEBB posts timely information including proposed regulations, news releases, Customs publications and notices, etc which may be "downloaded" to your own PC. The Customs Service does not charge the public to use the CEBB. You only pay telephone charges. The CEBB may be accessed by modem or through Customs Home Page on the World Wide Web. If you access it by modem, you must have a personal computer with a modem. The CEBB supports modem speeds from 2400 to 28,800 baud. Set up your terminal as ANSI, set databits to 8, set parity to N and stopbits to 1. Dial (703) 921-6155 and log on with your name and choose a password. After a few questions, you are set to get up-to-date information from Customs. If you have any questions about the CEBB, call (703) 921-6236.

### **The Internet**

The Customs home page on the Internet's World Wide Web --which began public operation on August 1, 1996-- will also provide the entire trade community with current, relevant information regarding Customs operations and items of special interest. It was established as another effort to promote the Customs Service as "trade friendly" within the importing and exporting community. The home page will post timely information including proposed and final regulations, rulings, news releases, Customs publications and notices, *etc.*, which may be searched, read online, printed or "downloaded" to your own PC. In addition, the CEBB (see above) may be accessed through our Home Page. The Customs Service does not charge the public for this service, although you will need Internet access to use it. The Internet address for Customs home page is <http://www.customs.ustreas.gov>.

### **Customs Regulations**

The current edition of *Customs Regulations of the United States*, in loose-leaf format, is available by subscription from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The bound 1997 Edition of Title 19, *Code of Federal Regulations*, which incorporates all changes to the *Customs Regulations* from April, 1996 through March, 1997 is also available for sale from the same address. All proposed and final regulations are published in the *Federal Register* which is published daily by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, and distributed by the Superintendent of Documents. Information on on-line access to the *Federal Register* may be obtained by calling (202) 512-1530 between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern time. These notices are also published in the weekly *Customs Bulletin* described below.

## Customs Bulletin

The *Customs Bulletin and Decisions* ("Customs Bulletin") is a weekly publication which contains decisions, rulings, regulatory proposals, notices and other information of interest to the trade community. It also contains decisions issued by the U. S. Court of International Trade and Customs related decisions of the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Bound volumes are issued annually. The Customs Bulletin is available for sale from the Superintendent of Documents.

## Video Tapes

The U.S. Customs Service has prepared a two hour video tape in VHS format to assist Customs officers and members of the public in understanding the new *Rules of Origin for Textiles and Apparel Products* which became effective on July 1, 1996. Copies of this tape are available from many trade organizations, Customs brokers, consultants and law firms. The tape may also be purchased for \$20.00 (U.S. funds) directly from the Customs Service. If you require further information, or would like to purchase one or more tapes, please forward your written request to: U.S. Customs Service, Office of Regulations and Rulings, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20229, Attn: Operational Oversight Division. Orders must be accompanied by a check or money order drawn on a U.S. financial institution and made payable to U.S. Customs Service.

In order to assist the trade, Customs has prepared a video tape entitled "Customs Compliance: Why You Should Care." This 30 minute tape is divided into two parts. Part I, almost 18 minutes in length, is designed to provide senior executives and others in importing and exporting companies with an overview of some significant features of the Customs "Modernization Act" and some major reasons for adopting new strategies for minimizing legal exposure under this Act. Part II is intended primarily for compliance officers, legal departments and company officers involved in importing and exporting. This latter Part, approximately 12 minutes in length, explains why Customs and the trade can benefit from sharing responsibilities under Customs laws and it provides viewers with some legal detail relating to record keeping, potential penalties for non-compliance, and Customs Prior Disclosure program.

Part I features former Customs Commissioner George Weise, Assistant Commissioner for Regulations and Rulings Stuart Seidel, and Motorola's Vice President and Director of Corporate Compliance, Mr. Jack Bradshaw. Assistant Commissioner Seidel is the only speaker in Part II.

The tape is priced at \$15.00 including postage. New orders, complete with payment in the form of a check or money order, should be addressed to the U.S. Customs Service, Office of Regulations and Rulings, Attention: Operational Oversight Division, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20229.

## **Informed Compliance Publications**

The U. S. Customs Service has also prepared other Informed Compliance publications in the *What Every Member of the Trade Community Should Know About:* series, which are available from the Customs Electronic Bulletin Board and the Customs Home Page (see above). As of the date of this publication, the following booklets were available:

- # [Fibers & Yarns](#)
- # [Buying & Selling Commissions](#)
- # [NAFTA for Textiles & Textile Articles](#)
- # [Raw Cotton](#)
- # [Customs Valuation](#)
- # [Textile & Apparel Rules of Origin](#)
- # [Mushrooms](#)
- # [Marble](#)
- # [Peanuts](#)
- # [Caviar](#)
- # [Bona Fide Sales & Sales for Exportation](#)
- # [Caviar](#)
- # [Granite](#)
- # [Internal Combustion Piston Engines](#)
- # [Vehicles, Parts and Accessories](#)
- # [Articles of Wax, Artificial Stone and Jewelry](#)
- # [Classification of Festive Articles](#)
- # [Tariff Classification](#)
- # [Ribbons & Trimmings](#)
- # [Agricultural Actual Use](#)
- # [Reasonable Care](#)

Check the Customs Electronic Bulletin Board and the Customs Home Page for more recent publications.

## **Other Value Publications**

*Customs Valuation under the Trade Agreements Act of 1979* is a 96-page book containing a detailed narrative description of the customs valuation system, the customs valuation title of the Trade Agreements Act (§402 of the Tariff Act of 1930, as amended by the Trade Agreements Act of 1979 (19 U.S.C. §1401a)), the Statement of Administrative Action which was sent to the U.S. Congress in conjunction with the TAA, regulations (19 C.F.R. §§152.000-152.108) implementing the valuation system (a few sections of the regulations have been amended subsequent to the publication of the book) and questions and answers concerning the valuation system. A copy may be obtained from the U.S. Customs Service, Office of Regulations and Rulings, Value Branch, 1300

Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20229.

*Customs Valuation Encyclopedia* (with updates) is comprised of relevant statutory provisions, Customs Regulations implementing the statute, portions of the Customs Valuation Code, judicial precedent, and administrative rulings involving application of valuation law. A copy may be purchased for a nominal charge from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15250-7054.

Additional information may be obtained from Customs ports of entry. Please consult your telephone directory for a Customs office near you. The listing will be found under U.S. Government, Treasury Department.

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